

# USING DRAMA ACTIVITIES AS A CATALYST IN IMPROVING COMMUNICATIVE CONFIDENCE: A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** This case study is about the use of drama activities as a catalyst in improving communicative confidence. The purpose of this study is to investigate the efficacy of drama activities in improving students' confidence in communicating using English, identify students' views on the use of drama activities as a communicative confidence-building tool, and consequently suggest how these activities can be incorporated in English language teaching. For this purpose, a workshop was organised and communicative drama activities were carried out with the participants of the programme, made up of 24 students from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Data for the study was obtained from these participants via feedback forms and questionnaires that were distributed to them. The data was then analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The research findings show that a majority of the participants reacted positively to the communicative drama activities and also agree with the use of drama activities in improving communicative confidence. At the end of the study, the suitability of drama activities as a tool for communicative confidence-building is determined. Besides that, suggestions for effective incorporation of communicative drama activities in English language teaching are also given.

**Abstrak:** Kajian kes ini adalah mengenai penggunaan aktiviti drama sebagai mangkin dalam meningkatkan keyakinan berkomunikasi. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat keberkesanan aktiviti drama dalam meningkatkan keyakinan pelajar dalam berkomunikasi menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris, mengenalpasti pandangan pelajar terhadap penggunaan aktiviti drama sebagai alat membina keyakinan dalam berkomunikasi, dan seterusnya mencadangkan bagaimana aktiviti-aktiviti ini dapat diterapkan dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Untuk tujuan ini, sebuah bengkel telah dianjurkan dan aktiviti drama berunsur komunikasi telah dijalankan bersama para peserta program, yang terdiri daripada 24 pelajar dari Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Data untuk kajian ini diperolehi melalui borang maklumbalas dan borang soal selidik yang diedarkan kepada mereka. Data tersebut kemudiannya dianalisa secara kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa sebahagian besar daripada peserta bertindak balas secara positif terhadap aktiviti drama berunsur komunikasi dan juga bersetuju dengan penggunaan aktiviti drama dalam meningkatkan keyakinan berkomunikasi. Di akhir kajian, kesesuaian aktiviti drama sebagai alat membina keyakinan berkomunikasi ditentukan. Selain itu, cadangan bagi penerapan berkesan aktiviti drama berunsur komunikasi dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris juga diberikan.

Keyword: communicative confidence, drama

## Introduction

It is observable on many different occasions that learners find themselves unable to effectively partake and be involved in classroom activities, particularly those that require the learners to speak in English such as asking questions during lectures, sharing their opinions and interpretations as well as oral presentations. This is true amongst students of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). This reluctance to participate in classroom discussions is very clearly exhibited in the university's mandatory English courses (UHB 1412, UHB 2422 and so on). It is not uncommon for lecturers teaching these courses to find themselves in situations whereby students do not respond to questions or other forms of prompting, resulting in a lengthy period of silence, especially if the question is directed to no one in particular. While there are times when students genuinely do not have anything to ask the lecturer or that they really are

unable to respond to the lecturer's query due to not knowing the answer, most of the time it would seem like the students would rather not ask or answer questions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A different approach is necessary in order to deal with the confidence problems related to communicating in English amongst UTM students. Further steps should be taken to incorporate the ability to express ideas clearly, effectively and confidently through written and oral mode in the students, which is a component in the generic skills identified by the university and an ability that would prove to be pivotal to the student in the future. Subsequently, as an extension and further reinforcement to the mandatory English language courses, supplementary programmes have been introduced and implemented for the benefit of the students. An example of this programme is the English Language Support Programme (ELSP) organized by the English Language Unit, Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) of UTM. Thus, this report aims to exhibit the response and feedback received from participants of this study, which would both illustrate the effect on the participants' confidence in using English, their attitude and reaction towards drama activities, as well as identifying and providing suggestions for future language support programmes.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study seeks to:

1. gauge the effectiveness of drama activities in improving students' confidence in communicating using the English language
1. identify students' views on using drama activities as a tool in building communicative confidence
2. make suggestions for successful incorporation of communicative drama activities in English language teaching

### **Scope of the Study**

The participants of this study are 24 undergraduate students from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia who took part in a theatre production workshop featuring drama activities organised by UTM's Persatuan Seni dan Drama (PERSEDA). Apart from this, no particular parameter such as age group and gender has been set for participant selection. The data will be collected primarily via feedback forms and questionnaires.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants of the Study**

The participants of this study are 24 undergraduate students selected amongst students of UTM who have participated in the theatre production workshop organised by PERSEDA. No discriminating parameters or conditions were set for the selection of participants. This is done to create the possibility of having a heterogeneous group of participants with different fields of specialization while sharing a common theme with one another.

## **Data Collection Method**

Several instruments such as a questionnaire and feedback forms are used to gather the data from the participants.

### **1. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire will be administered at the end of the final session of the workshop. This questionnaire will be used to elicit responses regarding the learners' attitude towards the workshop and their interaction experiences within it. The questionnaire will seek to find out the participants' views and feelings drama activities in general, the use of drama activities as an alternative method of building communicative confidence, the location, the facilitators and so on. Also, the questionnaire will also question if the participants would recommend that programmes of this sort be carried out again in the future, and if they would recommend that their other friends and peers take part in such programmes. Lastly, the questionnaire also contains room for the participants to make suggestions for the improvement in quality of future workshops or similar programmes.

### **2. Feedback Forms**

Apart from the questionnaire administered, feedback forms are also conducted at the end of the workshop session. The interview will attempt to find out whether the participants felt that their experience of participating in the drama activities conducted during the workshop has either encouraged or discouraged them in using English in their face-to-face communications and raised their confidence level in using the language. Details such as the participants' most favourite and least favourite aspect of the activity will also be obtained in the forms for reflective purposes.

## **Discussion**

### **Effectiveness of Drama Activities In Improving Students' Confidence in Communicating Using the English Language**

The data suggests that the drama activities carried out during the workshop was successful in improving students' confidence in communicating using the English language. This is reflected in the largely positive responses and feedback received from them. For example, as displayed in Figure 4.4, 68% of the participants which is approximately two-thirds of the group rated their confidence level during the Hunter-Hunted activity as 'Good' and 'Very Good'. Also, it was observed during the activity that the participants were motivated to participate. This is substantiated by the response given by the participants, in which 73% of them rated their motivation level during the Hunter-Hunted activity as 'Good' and 'Very Good' (refer to Figure 4.2). From the results discussed above, it can be seen that the participants generally felt confident and motivated while participating in the Hunter-Hunted activity. This trend continues into the Improv-Theatre activity, whereby according to Figure 4.9, 67% of the participants rated their confidence level during the activity as 'Good' and 'Very Good'. Their motivation level during the activity was also encouraging, whereby 71% of the participants rated their motivation level during the activity as 'Good' and 'Very Good'.

The data obtained from the questionnaire administered at the end of the workshop also suggests that the drama activities that were carried were successful in improving students' confidence in communicating using English. For example, as shown in Figure 4.11, 88% of the participants agree that the activities helped them build their confidence in using English. This is also further highlighted in the fact that 83% of the participants also agree that the activities encouraged them to communicate with other participants in English. As a result of their improved confidence as well as the encouragement they received, the

participants felt that they are more willing to communicate in English. This is reflected in the feedback received in which 88% of the participants agree that their willingness to speak in English has increased (Figure 4.12). To further substantiate, it should be noted that 79% of the participants also agree that they feel less anxious when speaking in English in front of an audience.

Overall, it can be concluded based on the participants' responses that drama activities are effective in improving their communicative confidence. The drama activities was successful in boosting their confidence and motivation level, as well as provide sufficient encouragement to the participants such that they felt that they are more willing to communicate in English and feel less anxious when speaking in front of an audience. This can be viewed as an indication of a reduced sense of inhibition on behalf of the participants, which in turn is a sign of generally improved confidence.

### **Students' Views on Using Drama Activities as a Tool in Building Communicative Confidence**

Based on the discussion and statistical figures highlighted in the previous section, it can be clearly observed that drama activities are effective tools in building communicative confidence. It also shows that the participants generally have positive views with regards to the use of drama activities for this very purpose. This can be seen in the feedback received from the participants in the form of comments in relation to what they liked or disliked about the drama activities that they took part in. For example, for the activity 'Hunter-Hunted', a large number of participants cited the communicative benefits as something that they liked about the activity. Samples of responses given by a few of the participants which reflect this are as follows:

*"I like this activity because it helps me to get more confidence to communicate."*

*"Practice communication in English and brave to answer."*

*"Like – it's a really enjoying activity for me to communicate and laugh with the others. Plus, it's kind of like a debate thing, so it's quite educational."*

Apart from the communicative benefits, the responses also mainly commented on the fact that the activities successfully boost the participants' confidence and motivation level. The participants also responded that the activities are both an enjoyable and fun experience for them.

This positive response by the participants is also evident in the Improv-Theatre activity whereby like Hunter-Hunted, many of the participants commented mainly on the activity being an enjoyable experience for them. The following are several comments given by the participants in order to illustrate this point:

*"It is fun, and it is full of imagination of the character that I played."*

*"I really like this activity. It was challenge me how to act in front of audience. Nervous actually but it was fun and good for self-confidence."*

*"I loved it! Really fun to act with my friends even though the roles were quite confusing plus the time limit. So, overall... it's one of the best activities I have went through all these while."*

Apart from the comments made by the participants on the feedback forms, the end-workshop questionnaire also contains some positive comments about the drama activities which echo the sentiments made clear in the feedback forms. Similar to their views of the Hunter-Hunted and Improv-Theatre activities, the participants commented that the activities boosts their confidence and motivation as well as

improve their English communication skills. The following are examples of several comments to this effect:

*“This program is so effective to anyone especially student to communicated with major confident in English language.”*

*“This activities help me to improve and increase my English skills. It also help me to give me more confidence to speak in front of person.”*

*“I really enjoying the Improv-theatre, but the time given to prepare and perform are rather short. The course is good, to improve English proficiency of participants and confidence among them.”*

Based on the feedback received in the form of comments as well as the statistical data highlighted, it is clear that the participants have positive views with regards to using drama activities as a tool in building communicative confidence. This is largely reflected in the participants themselves identifying that they were able to improve their confidence and motivation in communicating in English in a fun and enjoyable manner, as shown in the comments highlighted in this section. This, as well as the statistical data discussed in the previous section, would suggest that the participants view drama activities as an enjoyable and effective tool in building communicative confidence.

### **Suggestions for Successful Incorporation of Communicative Drama Activities in English Language Teaching**

In order to achieve successful incorporation of communicative drama activities in English language teaching, teachers should capitalise on the positives while work to improve on the identified negatives of the drama activities. For example, based on the data obtained, it should be noted that the participants commented favourably on the fact that the drama activities that they participated in are enjoyable and fun. While it is encouraging to know that the participants enjoyed the activities, what is more important is that the participants are able to perceive the objectives as well as the educational benefits of the drama activities that they went through. To this end, several suggestions to achieve successful incorporation of communicative drama activities in English language teaching are given in this section.

Firstly, it is important that the requirement of the task in the chosen drama activity suit the proficiency level of the participants. This is because the requirement of the task is a major influence to the participants' confidence and motivation level. As revealed in Figure 4.3, 82% of the participants agree that their motivation level were influenced by the requirements of the task during the Hunter-Hunted activity. Similarly, 77% of the participants also agree that their confidence level during the Hunter-Hunted activity were influenced by the requirements of the task (Figure 4.5). As for Improv-Theatre, Figure 4.8 records that 67% of the participants agree that their motivation level during the activity were influenced by the task requirement, while Figure 4.10 reveals that 83% of the participants felt their confidence level was influenced by the task requirement. These statistical data demonstrates that it is important for the English language teacher to choose drama activities that are suitable to the level of his or her students.

Secondly, instructions provided must be clear and concise so that the students understand what they are supposed to do and learn in the activity. It is useful that the students are made aware of the objectives of the activity as well as what they are supposed to do to achieve the said objectives. This is supported by the response of the participants of the workshop. As shown in Figure 4.3, 82% of the participants agreed that their motivation level during the Hunter-Hunted activity were influenced by the instructions that were provided. Figure 4.5 also shows that 55% of the participants agree that the instructions provided

influenced their confidence level during the activity. As for Improv-Theatre, 88% of the participants agreed that their motivation level were influenced by the instruction provided, as revealed in Figure 4.8. Figure 4.10 on the other hand shows that 88% of the participants agree that their confidence level were influenced by the instructions provided. This shows that clear instructions are vital in ensuring the effectiveness of the drama activity.

Thirdly, the teacher as the facilitator of the drama activity should also project a positive image to the students. It is important to remember that drama activities often require the students to lose their inhibition and be fully involved in the activities themselves. Therefore, the teacher's role in encouraging participation by the students is pivotal. This is corroborated by Figure 4.3 which shows that 73% of the participants agree that their motivation level during the Hunter-Hunted activity were influenced by the facilitators. In the same manner, 55% of the participants agree that their confidence level were influenced by the facilitators, as shown in Figure 4.5. Figure 4.8 reveals that during the Improv-Theatre activity, the motivation level of 58% of the participants were influenced by the facilitators. At the same time, Figure 4.10 shows that 58% of the participants' confidence level during the activity were influenced by the facilitators. This shows that the facilitator of the drama activity, which in this case is the teacher, plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of the drama activity as this has an effect on the confidence and motivation level of the students, which in turn affects their participation in the activity.

Next, identifying and procuring a suitable location for carrying out the drama activities should also be a priority to the teacher. The location, for practical reasons, should be an open area with sufficient space for the activity to be carried out. Besides that, the location should also be comfortable for the students as this affects their motivation and confidence during the activity. For example, Figure 4.3 shows that 41% of the participants felt that their motivation level during the Hunter-Hunted activity were influenced by the location in which the activity was carried out. Similarly, Figure 4.5 shows that 36% of the participants agree that their confidence level were influenced by the choice of location for the activity. Figure 4.8 reveals that during the Improv-Theatre activity, 42% of the participants' agree that their motivation level were influenced by the location. Figure 4.10 also supports this by showing that 46% of the participants agree that their confidence level were influenced by the location. While the statistics shows that the influence of location on confidence and motivation level of the students is not as profound as that of the task requirement and instructions provided, it is nonetheless just as significant as it has been identified as being able to affect students' confidence and motivation.

Lastly, a teacher should always remember to allocate some time at the end of each drama activity to reflect collectively as a class on the activity that had been carried out. This reflection session should be aimed at making the students be aware of and sharing with the class how they felt during the activity. Apart from that, the reflection session should also attempt to get the students to share with the class the things that they have learnt and benefited from as a result of the drama activity. This is important as this would allow the students to relate the language learning objectives to the drama activity that they had just experienced. As students associate what they did to the language learning objectives, the drama activity would make sense to the students and thus become a meaningful and memorable learning experience for them.

## **Conclusion**

### **Effectiveness of Using Drama Activities in Building Communicative Confidence**

Based on the findings of the study, it can be said that drama activities are effective in building communicative confidence. This is substantiated by the largely positive response received from the participants. A majority of the participants agree that the drama activities they went through successfully helped them build their confidence in using English. They felt more encouraged, motivated and willing to

communicate in English as well as feel less anxious when speaking in front of an audience. This suggests that the ability of drama activities in building communicative confidence within the student, reducing their anxiety as well as their fear and inhibition of using the English language in communication should be explored and capitalised upon.

### **Students' View of Drama Activities as a Communicative Confidence-Building Tool**

The findings reveal that the students have a positive view of the use of drama activities as a tool for building communicative confidence. In their comments on the activities that they went through, the students mostly highlighted that they enjoyed the activity and were able to perceive the difference to their level of confidence and motivation in communicating using English. This shows that apart from being an effective tool in building communicative confidence, drama activities are able to offer an enjoyable yet educational experience to the students.

### **Factors Influencing the Confidence and Motivation Level of Students During Drama Activities**

Amongst the factors identified as possibly having an effect on students' confidence and motivation level, the more profound factors are revealed to be the requirements of the task in the drama activity as well as the instructions provided to the students. The facilitators of the activity as well as the location at which the drama activity is carried out is shown to have an effect as well, albeit to a slightly lesser magnitude. As such, the English language teacher should take into careful consideration these factors and be sufficiently prepared before carrying out a drama activity in order to ensure that the activity would fulfil its purpose and achieve the learning objective.

It can be concluded that the use of drama activities as a catalyst in improving communicative confidence is effective and leads to a better and more holistic learning experience. The students were generally satisfied with the activities and have benefited from them. Their confidence and motivation in using English to communicate have improved as a result of these drama activities. Additionally, they were encouraged to participate in the activities and motivated to express themselves more, since the drama activities added a new dimension to the learning process that differ from the ones that the students are familiar with. These should be taken into consideration, for the benefit of both the students and, similarly, the English language teachers as well.

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